

Kazuichi Tamura

(1891 -)

Mr. Tamura was born in Japan into a farming family. Not wanting to be a farmer, he came to Hawaii in 1906 to seek employment. He got a job as an irrigation man with the Pioneer Mill Company on Maui and lived in the plantation camp at Puukolii for several years.

From 1906 until 1910, when he became an electrician for the Lahaina Light and Power Company, Mr. Tamura was successively a surveyor's helper, a wholesale liquor store employee, a postal clerk, and a mail carrier for a private company that delivered mail to Japanese only. From 1920 until his retirement in 1955, he was foreman of the company's refrigeration department.

Mr. Tamura's wife, a picture bride from Japan, came to Hawaii in 1917. They had five children.

Mr. Tamura tells the story of his life in Hawaii in terms of his employment and business associates.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

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INTERVIEW WITH KAZUICHI TAMURA

At his home, 966 Front Street, Lahaina 96761

Early 1972

T: Kazuichi Tamura

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

M: Let's see. Can we start then with you telling me about how you came to Hawaii?

T: I came Hawaii 1906--August 30, I think. And . . .

M: Why did you leave Japan?

T: I born in a farmer family. So I no like it as farmer (laughter), so away from that. So those day plenty Japanese in Hawaii. So I feel might as well I go Hawaii too. But I never thought come over here--what kind of work, what kind of place--I never know. But then . . .

M: You didn't know what you were going to do when you got here?

T: No. So I came Lahaina, see? Honolulu, and then I came Lahaina. And I work that time--let me see. Yes, Pioneer Mill Company. I work Pioneer Mill Company.

M: How did you get your job there?

T: Oh, those day, anybody come and ask--they give you job. So irrigation job, you know.

M: Oh.

T: It's called hanawai. Then, oh, hanawai only about few months, four-five months. Then they give me ditch man. Ditch man little bit up [in pay] than irrigation man. Then, ditch man . . .

M: What does a ditch man do?

T: Ditch man divides the water for the irrigation.

M: Oh, I see.

T: So certain . . .

M: Shutting off the different ditches and opening it.

T: . . . certain fields.

M: Yeh. Let me check (the recorder, which is turned off and on again) I wanted to be sure it was picking up your voice all right. (he chuckles) Okay.

T: Then I got sick--fever sick.

M: What kind?

T: Fever. Fever. Those day not like now days. The water not so good; then breathing not so good, you know, and all the time sick.

M: Yeh.

T: So plenty people get sick. Then I know same time I stay in the hospital, oh, this room--one, two pass away; another room, one-two pass away.

M: While you were in the hospital?

T: Yeh. But I was okay. They stick me with that thing [gave him an injection]. (laughter)

M: Where did you live at the plantation?

T: I live Puukolii first. Puukolii, over here about five miles away.

M: In a camp?

T: In a camp. And I live there about two year [and a] half, I think.

M: Did you have your own little house or what?

T: Oh, those day, you know the long houses.

M: Oh, you lived with a lot of men.

T: Oh yeh. Then I moved Lahaina after [being] sick, you see. Then I get job Lahaina--same Pioneer Mill Company.

M: What did you do then?

T: Help the surveyor. Survey. Then I quit plantation--field plantation. I work downtown.

M: Oh, what did you do downtown?

T: Oh, I work liquor wholesale store.

M: Liquor wholesale?

T: Yeh.

M: Oh, did you start your own business?

T: No, no, no, no. I get hired. That time, this Pioneer Company manager took the vacation and he went to Germany, so I go away from the plantation and go to the liquor wholesale store. Then when they come back after vacation, he see me I work downtown, so he ask me, "You come back plantation again." I no care go there, you see. Then after one year--I work certain jobs, you know--I can not stay liquor store because they scare plantation manager.

M: Oh, they let you go.

T: Those days, plantation manager strong power, you know. So I look for jobs, then I get the job U.S. Post Office. In those days they need to write in Japanese because plenty Japanese send their money to Japan or send letter, so they must want to stay there who knows Japanese writing. So I stay over there about six months, then open job only for a Japanese mail carrier only for Japanese mail.

M: What's that now? I don't follow.

T: What?

M: What's that again? I didn't understand.

T: I help the U.S. Post Office.

M: Yeh.

T: Then one Japanese start the business, only carry Japanese mail. Only Japanese mail. So that easy for me. See, I don't know the English so much easier for me. So I moved to that, into Japanese mail carrier and there about another two years, I think.

Then, this Lahaina section those day, no efficient electric for the outside town or houses, you see; only plantation house and the manager's home and the pump buildings and grinding--company grinding--sugar.

M: Yeh.

T: Then they start electric company, you see, so I figure I might as well take new job. (Lynda laughs) Then I go ask the plantation manager, you know. He say, "Oh sure, sure, you come back I give you job." Any job I like, but I like this job--electric jobs. That's new stuff in Lahaina, you see. So he say, "Okay. All right." Then I start electric department.

M: In what department?

T: Electric department. Electric. Electrical.

M: Oh, yeh. Yeh.

T: So those day I called Lahaina Light and Power Company.

M: Oh, you must have worked with Mr. [J.R.] McConkey.

T: Oh, yeh, yeh. Mr. McConkey. Oh, before I start, Mr. McConkey was electric.

M: Yeh, I talked to him this morning.

T: Oh, nice man. Good friend. Always he introduced, "This Tamura, my right-hand man." (laughter) I work forty-five years and then I retire fifteen years ago.

M: You stayed in that same thing.

T: Yeh. Forty-five years.

M: Wow.

T: I show you a paper. (recorder turned off and on again)

M: Pearl Harbor, it says here.

T: Oh yes, that day. Same day.

M: And you were made a provisional police officer. What were you supposed to do?

T: I was alien, you see, so they no give me the gun. (laughter) So only I help them, you know.

M: You helped.

T: Yes. When a car come--the automobile--I make that kind gate--through gate, you know, and so forth.

M: Uh huh, I see.

T: So I can not carry the gun. (chuckles)

M: Did you ever become a U.S. citizen?

T: No, alien Japan.

M: Oh.

T: Oh yeh.

M: You never became a citizen, then.

T: Citizen only after. (sounds of cars passing by and the shuffling of papers)

M: What made you decide to get citizenship? How come you decided to become a citizen?

T: Well, how long I stay here, you see. I like because I stay here long time. I never go back to Japan, you see.

M: You didn't want to go back there?

T: Oh no, only just visit. Then all my children lives over here and stay over here.

M: Nineteen fifty-four [1954 he became a citizen]. How did you meet your wife?

T: Wife? You heard before--picture bride?

M: Yes.

T: Yeh, her picture bride. (both chuckle)

M: Oh, she is. When did she come over?

T: Nineteen seventeen [1917]. I can give you exactly. Wait. (recorder turned off and on again) Let me see. There's a date. (a woman speaks to them from a distance and laughs) This paper May 17, 1917. (to the woman) How long you stay Yokohama? Two months, yeh? July or August you come here? (she says, "August") August. What day? (she says, "August 18") Yeh, 1917--August 18. That's right.

M: How did you become a picture bride? (Mr. Tamura chuckles and she responds but what she says is inaudible) So your parents back in Japan and her parents got together and shipped you off to Hawaii. (laughs) Were you frightened?

(she laughs) Huh? Were you nervous about it? (laughs and says, "No." Mr. Tamura laughs. She says, "Too young, you see. No think nothing, you know.") Uh huh. (she continues to speak but what she says is inaudible) Yeh, I know what you mean, uh huh. Hmm.

T: Here my retire picture--entire staff. Here McConkey. Here Karl Berg.

M: Wow. What's this?

T: My retire time, give me packet, everything all signed, you know.

M: Oh, oh.

T: Tompkin just pass away this month, yeh?

M: Hmm?

T: This month begin, Tompkin he pass away. These boys all work office. [George Whitney Tompkin]

M: I see.

T: Karl [Heinz] Berg [Pioneer Mill Company] manager; McConkey, that's my boss; Tompkin, mill superintendent.

M: What was this--an occasion of what?

T: Give me carrier bag [suitcase]. (laughs)

M: That's when you retired.

T: Yeh. That's a packet. Give me packet. (he is looking for something among his papers) There is one more. Where that paper go? Oh here, here's paper I think. Oh, you see, I was a good man. (Lynda chuckles) Yeh, good. (he chuckles)

M: Hmm.

T: See, I good man, yeh?

M: Yeh, I'll say.

T: Yeh. And here, good worker. Work, and side work--side business. (chuckles) Good worker. Good business. Ramsay.

M: Oh, you folks also sold Ramsay.

T: Oh yes, um hm. Sold . . .

M: Appliances.

T: That's right. This is first PM manager, this one.

M: What's his name, Heinz?

T: Mr. W. Y. Horner. Here Johnny [J. R. McConkey].

M: Yeh. (both chuckle)

T: See, I was a good man too. He say "Good man." (chuckles)
This one, Manager Berg--Karl Berg. This is Karl Berg,
manager.

M: You were an electrician from January 1910 to January 1920.

T: Um hum.

M: And a foreman.

T: Yeh.

M: Foreman of what?

T: Refrigeration department. Ice and soda department and ice
cream department and appliance department. McConkey, he
[in] charge of all but I help him.

M: In charge of the electrical.

T: No, no, all too.

M: Oh, all of the divisions--the departments.

T: Yeh, yeh.

M: I see. So you were like Number Two man.

T: Yeh, that's why he introduce to who came from Honolulu--
sales manager. He go out and I go and so this man say he
want sell this kind so-and-so and what I think. He say,
"Good or not?" Yeh, McConkey and I good friends.

M: Uh huh. Did you ever know Bucky Mair?

T: Who?

M: Bucky Mair. Mair--my family.

T: I don't know.

M: They lived in Lahaina.

T: You mean now?

M: No, back around 1938-39.

T: Oh, I was that time over here.

M: Yeh. (to his wife) Package for me?

T: Yeh, yeh.

M: Oh, thank you. (Mr. Tamura chuckles)

T: She went do.

M: Beautiful.

T: You know, the other day . . .

M: Maybe I can get her to take me afterward, huh, to show me her garden.

T: Oh, yeh, yeh, yeh.

M: I'd love to see her plants.

T: (showing a document) This one, go out sometime.

M: This was during the war too.

T: Yeh.

M: You had to have this to go out.

T: Go out. Otherwise, without the pass can not go out. I go out, yeh. Of course if I did, you see, I go visit friends. I can go out.

M: (to his wife) Do you sell your flowers? (laughter follows her inaudible response and ensuing discussion) You folks were glad to see the rain, huh?

T: Oh yeh, Lahaina, you know.

M: It's been dry, huh?

T: Dry place, especially this year. From last year, no rain. This time, this month, generally rainy season.

M: Yeh.

T: Here is my wife passport. (she says, "Japanese style")

M: Yeh. (after some discussion about her passport) Do you have to carry this sort of thing around with you?

T: No, don't have to now. We have to show when I retire and then we claim social security. That time they ask for this paper. How old and how marry and so. But other country, you know, like Filipino and so forth I think they no have this kind of paper. Only Japan, I think get.

M: Yeh, we don't have that.

T: Yeh, only Japan. So my daughter, the son, all . . .

M: How many children?

T: We have altogether five--three boys and two girls. Two boys, mainland; one boy and girl, Honolulu; and one girl, Wailuku. Our grandchild, twelve I think get. Mainland, five and Honolulu, four and Wailuku, three.

M: How long have you been in this house?

T: About twenty years.

M: Did you build it yourself?

T: Yeh, I bought this place. I like buy budget kind place; we no can buy. Lahaina no more place.

M: Where did you live before that?

T: Company house.

M: In Lahaina?

T: Oh yeh, in Lahaina, over by the . . .

M: Over by the mill?

T: Yeh, by the mill; near the mill and near the plantation office--main office--because my job, you know, so they want to contact quick, you see, so that's why. So I go any place after work, I have to report. If nobody stay home, I have to report to them before I go any place.

M: Oh really?

T: Yeh. Just like you in the calaboose. (laughter) In the calaboose. Yeh.

M: How come?

T: So busy my job. So busy. Rain, oh, go out. Sometimes trouble, you see, go out and come home; just change clothes, go out again, come home, change your clothes. (laughter)

M: You had to go and fix things or . . .

T: Oh yes, I go help the boys, you know, then go find the troubles, see. First thing is find the troubles and what kind of boy [to do the job]. All boys different. Some this kind job and some those kinds, you know.

M: Yeh.

T: So I find the trouble first, then I go hunt boys. Sometime go with boy.

M: Send them out to do the work.

T: Yeh. So all busy, busy, busy. Sometime vacation week I stay home so they call.

M: So you work anyway.

T: I work anyway. (laughter) Yeh, I think I work enough. Forty-five years.

M: Yeh. You worked for Pioneer Mill from 1910?

T: Yeh, electric department.

M: Yeh. It was actually called Lahaina . . .

T: Lahaina Light and Power Company.

M: Yeh, but it was part of Pioneer Mill.

T: Yeh. See, Lahaina Light and Power Company been called Lahaina Ice Company, I think. Then started light and power business, then change [name to] Lahaina Light and Power Company. So I join the first Lahaina Ice Company and then they change the name.

M: How did you get the training to do this electrical work?

T: Experience on the side.

M: You just sort of apprenticed to start with.

T: Yeh, that's right. And also, correspondence Japan book. Japanese book.

M: Oh, correspondence course.

T: Yeh, Japanese book.

M: Did you do that after you'd already started working in the electrical?

T: Yeh. So that time I join this job, only one power plant. Only one small one. And the motors, one water pump, you know. That was two hundred fifty horsepower. Then ten horsepower motor, two--one in the machine shop; one the portable, cement mixer and so forth. Portable. That's all. That's all the motor.

END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE

So busy, busy, busy, busy. Sometimes enough to sleep over there [at his place of work]. (laughter)

M: Yeh. When did you get your first car?

T: First car? First car--let me see--1915 I learn to drive.

M: Nineteen fifteen you what? I didn't hear.

T: I learn how to drive the car, 1915.

M: But you didn't have your own car yet.

T: Oh no, no. Those days, nobody had car. (wife laughs) This plantation, you know, Pioneer Company had manager's car and one, the big truck. Then Lahaina Store, they bought. We call Lahaina Store--that's plantation store--they bought one Ford truck. That's all the car over here [in] Lahaina. So that time, I go ask Lahaina Store. They don't use all the time, you know, those days. So sometimes I have to go far place like away other side, you know, water pump repair--begin working over there--then of course, electric air compression so involved, see, so that's why I have to go. So like that time, I go Lahaina Store, I ask, "Hey, tomorrow morning I want to go Kapana so let me have the truck." He say, "Okay," then I get Lahaina Store truck and that's how I go.

M: Oh, I see.

T: That time, you know, 1915. Then I think three, four, five year after my friend--he was working Bank of Hawaii--he

wanted to sell the car, he say. So "All right, I buy." I bought second-hand car about 1920, I think. Yeh? That's right. Small car. Two-man Ford car. Then I keep about three or four years, then I bought still Ford car but little bit better car--fancy car. (laughs) Behind get aluminum bar [chromium bumper], you know, and front radiator little bit nice, you see. Little bit nice, you know. (laughter) Then I keep another five or six years, then I bought the Chevrolet. Then the Chevrolet--I was busy, my children come big and first boy he drive the car. My first boy, then second boy drive the car, then third boy drive too. Then I turn in and I bought--what the car? I forget. Anyway, another car I bought. Then I give the boy that car, you see--third boy. I give third boy. Then I get no car to drive but the company car always I get easy.

Then I went Japan. I went Japan, you see; visit Japan. So that's why I give car to my boy.

M: Oh. When was that, you went to Japan?

T: That was 1955. Then I come back, I bought Hillman--small car. Hillman.

M: Yeh.

T: Then I turn in the Hillman, then I bought Corvair. (laughter) Then I turn in the Corvair, then I get this Dodge. I get Dodge now. (his wife says, "Corvair is good, you know.") Yeh, Corvair good car. Yeh, good riding. Two Ford and the Chevrolet; then after Chevrolet, I forget, I give George the car; then Hillman, Corvair, and Dodge now. So I bought seven cars. (Lynda chuckles) Corvair, that's good car; good riding. And how long I keep? A long time I keep but no give trouble, but I heard no parts. They no make anymore. And other Corvair always give trouble. But I don't know. My Corvair never give trouble. (chuckles)

M: Yeh, we had one and we didn't like it.

T: Yeh? (counter at 69)

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed and edited by Katherine B. Allen

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THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.